SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ *)

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The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, "Song of the Blessed One", forms part of the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata* [1]). Its 18 *adhyāya* chapters contain the report by Sañjaya of a dialogue between the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna and his Yadu Charioteer Kṛṣṇa, the eighth incarnation of Viṣṇu. The actual fighting is about to begin when Arjuna feels revulsion at the leading part which he must play in the impending slaughter of cousins and kinsmen. The exhortations of Lord Kṛṣṇa answer every doubt through a complete philosophical cycle, till Arjuna is ready to bend his whole mind, no longer divided against itself, to the great killing. The *Gītā* has attracted minds of bents entirely different from each other and from that of Arjuna. Each has interpreted the supposedly divine words so differently from all the others that the original seems far more suited to raise doubts and to split a personality than to heal an inner division. Any moral philosophy which managed to receive so many variant interpretations from minds developed in widely different types of

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*) The following abbreviations have been used: *G* = the *Bhagavad-gītā*; *J* = the *Jñāneśvarī*; *Mbh* = the *Mahābhārata*; *Up* = *Upaniṣad*; *RV* = the *Ṛg-veda*; *JBBRAS* = *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Bombay (formerly Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society); *ABORI* = *Annals* of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona; *A* = the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭalya; *JRAS* = *Journal* of the Royal Asiatic Society, London. For the historical background, my own *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* has been used without detailed reference.

1) *Mbh.* 6. 23-40 of the Poona edition, begun under the editorship of the late V. S. Sukṭhaṇkar, with the *Ādi*, *Sahbā*, *Āraṇyaka*, *Udyoga* and *Virāṭa parvans* completed under his direction. Succeeding volumes have been less satisfactory, and the edition is not yet completed. For the *Gītā* in particular, the readings generally assumed to be Śaṃkara's have been retained against the norm accepted for the rest of the edition. Among the many useful translations of the *Gītā* are those of F. Edgerton (Harvard Oriental Series), K. T. Telang (Sacred Book of the East), and S. Radhakrishnan (London, 1948).

society must be highly equivocal. No question remains of its basic validity if the meaning be so flexible. Yet the book has had its uses.

If a *Mahābhārata* war had actually been fought on the scale reported, nearly five million fighting men killed each other in an 18-day battle between Delhi and Thānesar; about 130,000 chariots (with their horses), an equal number of elephants, and thrice that number of riding horses were deployed. This means at least as many camp-followers and attendants as fighters. A host of this size could not be supplied without a total population of 200 millions, which India did not attain till the British period, and could not have reached without plentiful and cheap iron and steel for ploughshares and farmers' tools. Iron was certainly not available in any quantity to Indian peasants before the 6th century B.C. The greatest army camp credibly reported was of 400,000 men under Candragupta Maurya, who commanded the surplus of the newly developed Gangetic basin. The terms *patti*, *gulma* etc. given as tactical units in the *Mbh.* did not acquire that meaning till after the Mauryans. The heros fought with bows and arrows from their chariots, as if the numerous cavalry did not exist; but cavalry—which appeared late in Indian warfare—made the fighting chariots obsolete, as was proved by Alexander in the Punjab.

The epic began, like the early Homeric chants, as series of lays sung at the court of the conquerors. The lament was thinly veiled, presumably by irony; the defeated Kurus survived in legend (*e.g.* the *Kuru-dhamma-jātaka*) as unsurpassable in rectitude and nobility of character. Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa had no role to play even in the first connected epic narrative. Should the reader doubt all this, let him read the final cantos of the extant *Mbh.* The Pāṇḍavas come in the end to disgraceful old age, and unattended death in the wilderness. Their opponents are admitted to heaven as of right, but the heros are only transferred there from the tortures of hell, after a long and stubborn effort by the eldest, Yudhiṣṭhira. It strikes even the most casual eye that this is still the older heaven of Indra and Yama; Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa is not its dominant figure, but a palpable and trifling insertion in a corner.

Those legendary Utopians, the pure and unconquerable Uttara-Kurus

of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* (*DN* 32) and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (*AB* 8. 14; 8. 23) are not to be confused with the Kurus who survived in historical times near Delhi-Meerut. The Buddha preached several of his sermons at the settlement Kammāsa-damma in Kuru-land (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10; 75; 106) while their capital seems to have been at Thulla-koṭṭhita (*MN* 82), the seat of the nameless petty tribal Kuru chief, presumably descended from the Pāṇḍava conquerors whom the epic was to inflate beyond all limits. This negligible 'kingdom' either faded away or was among the tribal groups systematically destroyed by the Magadhan emperor Mahāpadma Nanda, a few years before Alexander's raid into the Punjab. The memory, however, remains—as of a tribe, but not a full-fledged kingdom with a class structure—in the eleventh book of the *Arthaśāstra*, along with similar oligarchies like the Licchavis and the Mallas known to have been destroyed about 475 *BC*. As for Nārāyaṇa, it might be noted here that the famous benedictory initial stanza *Nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya*, which would make the whole of the extant *Mbh* into a Vaiṣṇava document, was stripped off by V.S. Sukṭhaṇkar's text-criticism in 1933 as a late forgery.

1. FOR WHAT CLASS? We know that the *Gītā* exercised a profound influence upon Mahātmā Gāndhi, B. G. Ṭiḷak, the 13th century Mahārāṣṭrian reformer Jñāneśvara, the earlier Vaiṣṇava *ācārya* Rāmānuja, and the still earlier Śaṃkara[1]). Though both fighting in the cause of India's liberation from British rule, Ṭiḷak and the Mahātmā certainly did not draw concordant guidance for action from the *Gītā*, while Aurobindo Ghose renounced the struggle for India's freedom to concentrate upon its study. Lokamānya Ṭiḷak knew the *Jñāneśvarī* comment, but his *Gītā-rahasya* is far from being based upon the earlier work. Jñāneśvara himself did not paraphrase Śaṃkara on the *Gītā*,

1) R. G. Bhāṇḍārkar's *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems* (originally published in 1913 in the *Grundriss d. Indo-Arischen Philologie u. Altertumskunde*; re-issued, Poona 1929, in vol. IV of his collected works) gives a good summary of the influence of the doctrine in the classical and medieval period, but without reference to the historical context which was indeed not known at the time. Its influence upon Bhāṇḍārkar himself led to a petty reformist movement, the Prārthanā Samāj (an offshoot of the Brāhmo Samāj) in which RGB was the dominant figure.

nor does his very free interpretation follow Rāmānuja; tradition ascribes to him membership of the rather fantastic *nātha* sect. Rāmānuja's Vaiṣṇavism laid a secure foundation for the acrid controversy with the earlier followers of Śiva who came into prominence with the great Śaṃkara. But then, why did Śaṃkara also turn to the *Bhagavad-gītā*?

What common need did these outstanding thinkers have that was at the same time not felt by ordinary people, even of their own class? They all belonged to the leisured class of what, for lack of a better term, may be called Hindus. The consequent bias must not be ignored, for the great comparable poet-teachers from the common people did very well without the *Gītā*. Kabīr, the Banāras weaver, had both Muslim and Hindu followers for his plain yet profound teaching. Tukārāma knew the *Gītā* through the *Jñāneśvarī*, but worshipped Viṣṇu in his own way by meditation upon God and contemporary society in the ancient caves (Buddhist and natural) near the junction of the Indrāyaṇī and Paünā rivers. Neither Jayadeva's *Gīta-govinda*, so musical and supremely beautiful a literary effort, charged with the love and mystery of Kṛṣṇa's cult, nor the Viṣṇuite reforms of Caitanya that swept the peasantry of Bengal off its feet were founded on the rock of the *Gītā*. I have yet to hear that the heterogeneous collection which forms the Sikh canon owes anything substantial directly to the *Gītā*, though it preserves verses due to Jayadeva, and the Mahārāṣṭrian Nāmadeva. Jñāneśvara ran foul of current brahmin belief at Āḷandī, and had to take refuge about 1290 *A.D.* on the south bank of the Godavari, in the domains of Rāmacandra Yādava, to write his famous gloss in the common people's language.

We know as little of the historic action taken or instigated by Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja as we should have known of Ṭilak's had only his *Gītā-rahasya* survived. Yet, about the year 800, Śaṃkara was active in some manner that resulted—according to tradition—in the abolition of many Buddhist monasteries. That this was achieved by his penetrating logic and sheer ability in disputation is the general belief. The mass of writing left in his name, and what is given therein as the Buddhist doctrine which he refutes, make only one thing clear: that

he had not the remotest idea of Gotama Buddha's original teaching. Buddhism as practised in the monasteries had in any case degenerated into Lamaism, with opulent *vihāra* foundations which were a serious drain upon the economy of the country. That Śaṃkara's activity provided a stimulus to their abolition, and Rāmānuja's some handle against the wealthier barons whose worship of Śiva was associated in the popular mind with their oppressive land-rent, seems a reasonable conclusion on the evidence before us. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain why the richer, aristocratic landholders opted for Śiva, the poorer and relatively plebeian overwhelmingly for Viṣṇu, in the bitter *smārta-vaiṣṇava* feuds. It is difficult to believe that they could come to blows because of differing religious philosophy. Śaṃkara managed to discover a higher and lower knowledge in the Upaniṣads which allowed him "to conform to the whole apparatus of Hindu belief"—whatever that may mean—"on the lower plane, while on the higher he finds no true reality in anything; his logic, it has been well said, starts by denying the truth of the proposition 'A is either B or not B' . . . At death the soul when released is merged in the absolute and does not continue to be distinct from it". According to Rāmānuja, "if in a sense there is an absolute whence all is derived, the individual souls and matter still have a reality of their own, and the end of life is not merger in the absolute but continued blissful existence. This state is to be won by *bhakti*, faith in and devotion to God". It is not possible to imagine that subtle arguments on these tenuous ideas gripped the masses, that people could be whipped up to a frenzy merely by the concept of restricted dualism (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) or thoroughgoing dualism (*dvaita*). Yet frenzied conflict there was for centuries. Neither side objected to rendering faithful service at the same time to beef-eating Muslim overlords, who knocked brahmins off without compunction or retribution, and desecrated temples without divine punishment.

The main conclusion is surely the following: Practically anything can be read into the *Gītā* by a determined person, without denying the validity of a class system. The *Gītā* furnished the one scriptural source which could be used without violence to accepted brahmin

methodology, to draw inspiration and justification for social actions in some way disagreeable to a branch of the ruling class upon whose mercy the brahmins depended at the moment. That the action was not mere personal opportunism is obvious in each of the cases cited above. It remains to show how the document achieved this unique position.

2. A REMARKABLE INTERPOLATION. That the song divine is sung for the upper classes by the brahmins, and only through them for others, is clear. We hear from the mouth of Kṛṣṇa himself (*G.*9.32): "For those who take refuge in Me, be they even of the sinful breeds such as women, vaiśyas, and śūdras . . .". That is, all women, and all men of the working and producing classes are defiled by their very birth, though they may in after-life be freed by their faith in the god who degrades them so casually in this one. Not only that, the god himself had created such differences (*G.*4.13): "The four-caste (-class) division has been created by Me"; this is proclaimed in the list of great achievements.

The doctrines are certainly not timeless [1]). Ethics come into being only as they serve some social need. Food-producing society (as distinct from conflicting aggregates of food-gathering tribal groups) originated in the fairly recent and definite historical past, so that the principles upon which it may work at some given stage could not have been expressed from eternity. The *Gītā* sets out each preceding doctrine in a masterly and sympathetic way without naming or dissecting it, and with consummate skill passes smoothly on to another when Arjuna asks "why then do you ask me to do something so repulsive and clearly against this?" Thus, we have a brilliant (if plagiarist) review-synthesis of many schools of thought which were in many respects mutually incompatible. The incompatibility is never brought out; all views are simply facets of the one divine mind. The best in each system

1) In particular, the translation of *dharma* as religion, or even a universal Law for all society, was a new concept with Buddhism, not accepted even after the time of the *G.* For example: *Manusmṛti* 8. 41 reads "The (king) must inquire into the laws (*dharma*) of each caste (*jāti*), district (*janapada*), guild (*śreṇī*), and household (*kula*), and only then give his own legal decision (*svadharma*)". A great deal of the confusion over the *Gītā* derives from ignorance of reality, of the actual practices of large social groups; and from taking brahmin documents as representative of all Indian society.

is derived, naturally, as from the high God. There is none of the polemic so characteristic of disputatious Indian philosophy; only the Vedic ritual beloved of the Mīmāṃsakas is condemned outright. The Upaniṣads are well—if anonymously—represented, though the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* alone contains the germ of *bhakti*, and none the theory of perfection through a large succession of rebirths. This function of *karma* is characteristically Buddhist. Without Buddhism, *G.*2.55-72 (recited daily as prayers at Mahātmā Gāndhi's *āśrama*) would be impossible. The *brahma-nirvāṇa* of *G.*2.72, and 5.25 is the Buddhist ideal state of escape from the effect of *karma*. We may similarly trace other—unlabelled—schools of thought such as Sāṃkhya and Mīmāṃsā down to early Vedānta (*G.*15.15 supported by the reference to the *Brahma-sūtra* in *G.*13.4). This helps date the work somewhere between 150-350 *AD*, nearer the later than the earlier date. The ideas are much older, and not original, except perhaps the novel use of *bhakti*. The language is high classical Sanskrit such as could not have been written much before the Guptas, though the metre still shows the occasional irregularity (*G.*8.10^{d}, 8.11^{b}, 15.3^{a}, etc.) in *triṣṭubhs*, characteristic of the *Mbh* as a whole. The Sanskrit of the high Gupta period, shortly after the time of the *Gītā*, would have been more careful in versification.

It is known in any case that the *Mbh* and the Purāṇas suffered a major revision [1]) in the period given above. The *Mbh* in particular was in the hands of brahmins belonging to the Bhṛgu clan, who inflated it to about its present bulk (though the process of inflation continued afterwards) before the Gupta age came to flower. The Purāṇas also continued to be written or rewritten to assimilate some particular cult to brahminism. The last discernible redaction of the main Purāṇa group refers to the Guptas still as local princes between Fyzabad and Prayag [1]). This context fits the *Gītā* quite well. The earliest dated mention of anything that could possibly represent the *Gītā* is by Hsüan

1) The standard reference work is F. E. Pargiter's *The purāṇa text of the dynasties of the Kali age* (Oxford, 1913). Some of the theories have been contested, but the work has survived and gained a well-deserved reputation for its synoptic edition of the historical kernel in the major Purāṇas.

Tsang [1]), early in the seventh century, who refers to a brahmin having forged at his king's order such a text (supposedly of antiquity), which was then 'discovered', in order to foment war. The fact does remain that the *Mbh* existed in two versions at the time of the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra*, which refers both to the *Bhārata* and the *Mahābhārata* [2]). The prologue of the present *Mbh* repeats much the same information in such a way as to make it evident that the older 24,000-*śloka Bhārata* was still current at the time the longer version was promulgated. Every attempt was made to ascribe both to the great 'expander', Vyāsa, to whom almost every Purāṇa is also ascribed. A common factor is the number *18*, which had some particular sanctity for the whole complex, and for the brahmins connected therewith. There are *18* main *gotra* clan-groups of brahmins [3]), though the main *ṛṣi* sages are only seven in

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1) Translated in S. Beal: *Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London 1884, vol. 1, pp. 184-186). The equivalent of *G.* 2. 37 does occur on p. 185, and the association with a great battle at *Dharmakṣetra*, where bones still whitened the earth, is explicit, in an otherwise garbled account.

2) V. S. Sukṭhaṇkar: *The Nala episode and the Rāmāyaṇa* in *Festschrift* F. W. Thomas, pp. 294-303, especially p. 302, where he concludes that the two versions bracket the extant *Rāmāyaṇa*. The paper is reprinted in his Memorial edition (Poona 1944), pp. 406-415. For the mechanism of inflation, see his *Epic Studies VI*; and my notes on the *Parvasaṃgraha*, in the *JAOS* 69. 110-117; for the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and the 745 stanzas of the *Gītā*, ibid., 71. 21-25.

3) J. Brough: *The early Brahmanical system of gotra and pravara* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 27, notes that the *kevala* Āṅgirasas are completely omitted by Hiraṇyakeśi-Satyāṣāḍha, but takes this to be a casual lacuna. So great an omission is highly improbable. My review in *JAOS* 73. 202-208 was mistaken for a polemic, when the point being made was that theoretical works on *gotra* need to be checked by independent observation. For example, the *segrava* (= *śaigrava*) *gotra* found in Brāhmī inscriptions at Mathurā is not known to the books. Even more striking are the innumerable local brahmin groups whose conforming to theory has never been tested. City people in Mahārāṣṭra take brahmins to be primarily of the Sārasvat, Citpāvan, Deśastha and Karhāḍā groups. The 1941 *Census* caste tables for Bombay province as published show that such categories are together outnumbered by the 'Other Brahmans', and that local brahmin groups are the rule, though the books and theory are in the hands of the major groups named. The Bhṛgus are specially connected with the *Mbh* inflation, as was shown by V. S. Sukṭhaṇkar in his magnificent *Epic Studies VI* (*ABORI* 18. 1-76; *Mem. Ed.* 1. 278-337). It is important to note that the Bhārgava inflation was independent of though not hostile to the Nārāyaṇīya inflation, which continued after the first had tapered off. So much so, that the famous benedictory stanza *Nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya* of the popular editions drops out of the critical text,

number; many of the *18* (e.g. the *kevala* Bhārgavas and *kevala* Āṅgirasas) are difficult to fit into a rational scheme. Correspondingly, there are *18* main Purāṇas, and *18 parvan* sections of the *Mbh*, though the previous division was into *100*, as we learn from the prologue. The very action of the Bhāratan war was fought over *18* days between *18* legions. The *Gītā* has also *18 adhyāyas*, which is surely not without significance. That the older *Bhārata* epic had a shorter but similar *Gītā* is most unlikely. One could expect some sort of an exhortation to war, as is actually contained in *G.* 2. 37: "If slain, you gain heaven; if victorious, the earth; so up, son of Kuntī, and concentrate on fighting". These lines fit the occasion very well. Such pre-battle urging was customary in all lands at all times (advocated even by the supremely practical *Arthaśāstra*, 10. 3) through invocations and incantations, songs of bards, proclamations by heralds, and speeches of captains or kings. What is highly improbable—except to the brahmin bent upon getting his *nīti* revisions into a popular lay of war—is this most intricate three-hour discourse on moral philosophy, after the battle-conches had blared out in mutual defiance and two vast armies had begun their inexorable movement towards collision.

To put it bluntly, the utility of the *Gītā* derives from its peculiar fundamental defect, namely dexterity in seeming to reconcile the irreconcilable. The high god repeatedly emphasizes the great virtue of non-killing (*ahiṃsā*), yet the entire discourse is an incentive to war. So *G.* 2. 19 ff. says that it is impossible to kill or be killed. The soul merely puts off an old body as a man his old clothes, in exchange for new; it cannot be cut by weapons, nor suffer from fire, water or the storm. In *G.* 11, the terrified Arjuna sees all the warriors of both sides rush into a gigantic Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa's innumerable voracious mouths, to be swallowed up or crushed. The moral is pointed by the demoniac god himself (*G.* 11. 33): that all the warriors on the field would really

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but most of the properly Bhārgava inflations (e.g. needless emphasis upon Paraśurāma) all remain. In *G.* 10.25, the lord reveals himself as Bhṛgu among the great sages (*maharṣīṇām Bhṛgur aham*), though that sage occupies no position in Vedic tradition, and a trifling one even later.

be destroyed by him; Arjuna's killing them would be a purely formal affair whereby he could win the opulent kingdom. Again, though the *yajña* sacrifice is played down or derided, it is admitted in *G.* 3. 14 to be the generator of rain, without which food and life would be impossible. This slippery opportunism characterizes the whole book.

The *Gītā* was obviously a new composition, not the expansion of some proportionately shorter religious instruction in the old version. I next propose to show that the effort did not take hold for some centuries after the composition.

3. NOT SUFFICIENT UNTO THE PURPOSE. The lower classes were necessary as an audience, and the heroic lays of ancient war drew them to the recitation. This made the epic a most convenient vehicle for any doctrine which the brahmins wanted to insert, even better than rewriting the Purāṇas, or faking new Purāṇas for age-old cults. The Sanskrit language was convenient, if kept simple, because the Prakrits were breaking apart into far too many regional languages, and Sanskrit was the language which the upper classes had begun to utilize more and more. Kuṣāṇa and Sātavāhana inscriptions are in the popular *lingua franca* used by monk and trader. But from 150 *AD*, there appears a new type of chief (oftener than not of foreign origin like Rudradāman) who brags [1]) in ornate Sanskrit of his achievements, including knowledge of Sanskrit. The Buddhists had begun to ignore the Teacher's injunction to use the common people's languages; they too adopted Sanskrit. The high period of classical Sanskrit literature really begins with their religious passion-plays and poems, such as those written by Aśvaghoṣa [2]). A patrician class favouring Sanskrit as well as the Sanskrit-knowing priestly class was in existence.

No one could object to the interpolation [3]) of a story (*ākhyāna*) or

1) *Epigraphia Indica* 8. 36 ff.

2) Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda* still exist, not to speak of *subhāṣita* verses scattered through anthologies in his name. The fragments of a play *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* were arranged in order by H. Lüders, from Central Asian (Turfan) finds. This or another play of the same name was acted by hired actors in Fa Hsien's time in the Gupta heartland, as were also similar plays on the conversion of Moggallāna and Kassapa; note that all three disciples were brahmins.

3) The *Mbh* diaskeuasts proclaim their desire to include everything. In *Mbh*

episode. After all, the *Mbh* purports to be the recitation in the Naimiṣa forest to the assembled sages and ascetics by a bard Ugraśravas, who repeated what Vyāsa had sung to Janamejaya as having been reported by Sañjaya to Dhṛtarāṣṭra! The brahmins were dissatisfied with the profit derived from the *Gītā*, not with its authenticity. So, we have the *Anu-gītā*[1]) as a prominent sequel in the 14th Canto (*Aśvamedha-parvan*). Arjuna confesses that he has forgotten all the fine things told before the battle, and prays for another lesson. Kṛṣṇa replies that it would be impossible even for him to dredge it out of his memory once again; the great effort was not to be duplicated. However, an incredibly shoddy second *Gītā* is offered instead, which simply extols brahminism and the brahmin. Clearly, that was felt necessary at the time by the inflators though no one reads it now, and it cannot be compared to the first *Gītā* even for a moment.

Secondly, the *Gītā* as it stands could not possibly help any kṣatriya in an imminent struggle, if indeed he could take his mind off the battle long enough to understand even a fraction of it. The ostensible moral is: "Kill your brother, if duty calls, without passion; as long as you have faith in Me, all sins are forgiven". Now the history of India always shows not only brothers but even fathers and sons fighting to the death over the throne, without the slightest hesitation or need for divine guidance. Indra took his own father by the foot and smashed him (*RV.* 4. 18. 12), a feat which the brahmin Vāmadeva applauds. Ajāta-śatru, king of Magadha, imprisoned his father Bimbisāra to usurp the throne, and then had the old man killed in prison. Yet, even the Buddhists[2]) and Jains as well as *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2. 1) praise the son (who was the founder of India's first great empire) as a wise and able king. The *Arthaśāstra* (*A.* 1. 17-18) devotes a chapter to

1. 1-2, the work is successively an *itihāsa*, a *purāṇa*, an *upaniṣad*, a *veda*, and outweighs all four vedas together. It is the storehouse for poets. *Mbh.* 1. 56. 33 boasts: *yad ihāsti tad anyatra, yan nehāsti na tat kva-cit*: whatever was here might be elsewhere, but what was not here could hardly ever be found!

1) Translated by K. T. Telang, see Note 1. There is an *Uttaragītā*, a quite modern apocryphal work.

2) This is the second *sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, and has served as the model, in many ways, for the later *Milindpañho*, questions of king Menander.

precautions against such ambitious heirs-apparent; and shows in the next how the heir-apparent could circumvent them if he were in a hurry to wear the crown. Kṛṣṇa himself at Kurukṣetra had simply to point to the Yādava contingent, his own people, who were fighting in the opposite ranks. The legend tells us that all the Yādavas ultimately perished fighting among themselves. Earlier, Kṛṣṇa had killed his maternal uncle Kaṃsa. The tale gains a new and peculiar force if it be remembered that under mother-right, the new chief must always be the sister's son of the old.

Thirdly, Kṛṣṇa as he appears in the *Mbh* is singularly ill-suited to propound any really moral doctrine. The most venerable character of the epic, Bhīṣma, takes up the greatest of *Mbh* parvans (*Śānti*) with preaching morality on three important questions: King-craft (*rāja-dharma*), conduct in distress (*āpad-dharma*), and emancipation (*mokṣa-dharma*). As regent, he had administered the kingdom to which he had freely surrendered his own right. He had shown irresistible prowess and incomparable knightly honour throughout a long life of unquestioned integrity. The sole reproach anyone can make is that he uses far too many words for a man shot full of arrows, dying like a hedgehog on a support of its own quills. Still, Bhīṣma seems eminently fitted to teach rectitude. But Kṛṣṇa? At every single crisis of the war, his advice wins the day by the crookedest of means which could never have occurred to the others. To kill Bhīṣma, Śikhaṇḍin was used as a living shield against whom that perfect knight would not raise a weapon, because of doubtful sex. Droṇa was polished off while stunned by the deliberate false report of his son's death. Karṇa was shot down against all rules of chivalry when dismounted and unarmed; Duryodhana bludgeoned to death after a foul mace blow that shattered his thigh. This is by no means the complete list of iniquities. When taxed with these transgressions, Kṛṣṇa replies bluntly at the end of the *Śalya-parvan* that the man could not have been killed in any other way, that victory could never have been won otherwise. The calculated treachery of the *Arthaśāstra* saturates the actions of this divine exponent of the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

4. WHY KṚṢṆA? Just as the *Mbh* could be used as a basis only because people came to hear the war-story recited, Kṛṣṇa could have been of importance only if his cult were rising in popularity, yet sufficiently unformed for such barefaced remoulding. The cult, however, is clearly synthetic. The identification with Nārāyaṇa is a syncretism, taking originally distinct cults as one. In the same direction is the assimilation of many sagas to a single Kṛṣṇa legend, whether or not the original hero bore the epithet of Kṛṣṇa. There would, however, be no question of creating a new cult out of whole cloth; some worship or set of similar worships must already have been in existence among the common people before any brahmins could be attracted thereto. The best such recent example is that of Satya-nārāyaṇa, 'the true Nārāyaṇa', so popular all over the country, but which has no foundation whatever in scripture, and which is not even mentioned 200 years ago. Indeed, the origin seems to be in the popular legends of one Satya Pīr [1]), in Bengal; the Pīr himself became Satya-nārāyaṇa.

The Vedas have a Viṣṇu, but no Nārāyaṇa. The etymology seems to be 'he who sleeps upon the flowing waters (*nārā*)' and this is taken as the steady state of Nārāyaṇa [2]). It precisely describes the Mesopotamian Ea or Enki, who sleeps in his chamber in the midst of the waters, as Sumerian myth, and many a Sumerian seal, tell us. The word *nārā* (plural) for 'the waters' is not Indo-Aryan. Both the word and the god might conceivably go back to the Indus Valley. The later appearance in Sanskrit only means that the peaceful assimilation of the people who transmitted the legend was late. At any rate, the flood-and-creation myth (so natural in a Monsoon country) connects the first three *avatāras*, Fish, Tortoise, and Boar—surely related to primitive totemic worships. One performance of this Nārāyaṇa is shared by Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*: the *viśva-rūpa-darśana* showing that the god contains

1) The only published source I have been able to locate for the original cult is the *Satya Pirer Kathā* in Bengali by Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭācaryya (*ed.* by Śrī-Nagendranāth Gupta, Calcutta University, 1930).

2) This paragraph and the next are treated in greater detail in a paper of mine on the *avatāra* syncretism and possible sources of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *JBBRAS*, vol. 24-25 (1948-9), pp. 121-134.

the whole universe; he individually represents the best specimen of each species in it. Though familiar to most of us as in *Gītā* 10-11, there is a prototype version without Kṛṣṇa in *Mbh* 3. 186. 39-112, which shows that an all-pervading Nārāyaṇa had been invented much earlier.

The speech-goddess *Vāg-ambhṛṇī*, in a famous but late hymn of the *Ṛgveda* (*RV.* 10. 125), declares that she draws Rudra's bow, and is herself Soma and the substance of all that is best. The original god whose misdeeds are never sin is surely the Upaniṣadic Indra who says to Pratardana Daivodāsī: "Know thou Me alone; this indeed do I deem man's supreme good—that he should know Me. I slew the three-headed Tvāṣṭra, threw the Arurmagha ascetics to the wolves, and transgressing many a treaty, I pierced through and through the Prahlādīyans in the heavens, the Paulomas in the upper air, and the Kālakāñjas on this earth. Yet such was I then that I never turned a hair. So, he who understands Me, his world is not injured by any deed whatever of his: not by his killing his own mother, by killing his own father, by robbery, killing an embryo, or the commission of any sin whatever does his complexion fade" (*Kauṣ. Brāh. Up.* 3. 2). The 'breaking many a treaty' is again the *Arthaśāstra* king's normal practice, though that book mentions that in olden days even a treaty concluded by simple word of mouth was sacred (*A.* 7. 17). Indra performed all these dismal feats in Vedic tradition, but that tradition nowhere makes him proclaim himself as the supreme object for *bhakti*; *pāpa* and *bhakti* are not Vedic concepts. No Vedic god can bestow plenary absolution as in *G.* 18. 66: "Having cast off all (other) beliefs, rites and observances, yield to Me alone; I shall deliver you from all sin, never fear". The reason Kṛṣṇa could do this and not Indra was that the older god was clearly circumscribed by immutable Vedic *sūktas* and tied to the Vedic *yajña* fire-ritual. He was the model of the ruffianly Aryan war-leader who could get drunk with his followers and lead them to victory in the fight. His lustre had been sadly tarnished by intervening Buddhism, which had flatly denied *yajña* and brought in a whole new conception of morality and social justice. The pastoral form of bronze-age society with which Indra was indissolubly connected had gone out of productive existence.

Kṛṣṇa or rather one of the many Kṛṣṇas also represented this antogonism. The legend of his enmity to Indra reflects in the *Rgveda* [1]) the historical struggle of the dark pre-Aryans against the marauding Aryans. The black skin-colour was not an insurmountable obstacle, for we find a Kṛṣṇa Āṅgirasa as a Vedic seer. The Yadus are a Vedic tribe too, but no Kṛṣṇa seems associated with them, though the 'bound Yadu' prisoner of war is mentioned. There was a 'Kṛṣṇa the son of Devakī' to whom Ghora Āṅgirasa imparted some moral discipline, according to *Chāndogya Up.* 3. 17. 1-7. The Mahānubhāvas take Sāṃdīpani as Kṛṣṇa's *guru*, and a few include the irascible Durvāsa in the list of his teachers. Kṛṣṇa the athletic Kaṃsa-killer could best anyone in the arena, whether or not he was the same Kṛṣṇa who wrestled down Kāliya, the many-headed *Nāga* snake-demon that infested the Yamunā river at Mathurā. Naturally the Greeks who saw his cult in India at the time of Alexander's invasion identified Kṛṣṇa with their own Herakles [2]). (The taming of the *Nāga* has perhaps a deeper significance than Herakles decapitating the Hydra, a feat still earlier portrayed in

1) *RV.* 8. 96. 13-14, but sometimes interpreted mystically as part of the Soma legend. The traditional explanation is that this Kṛṣṇa was an 'Asura', i.e. non-Aryan, and the fighting against Indra on the banks of the Aṃśumatī river was real, not symbolic of something else.

2) One feature of the Kṛṣṇa myth, which still puzzles Indians, would have been quite familiar to the Greeks. The incarnate god was killed—unique in all Indian tradition—by an arrow shot into his heel, as were Achilles and other Bronze-age heros. Moreover, the archer Jaras is given in most accounts as Kṛṣṇa's half-brother, obviously the tanist of the sacred king who had to kill the senior twin. Kṛṣṇa himself consoles the repentant killer, and absolves him by saying that his time had come; the sacred king's appointed term had ended. One might venture the guess that the original unpardonable sin committed by Indra and perhaps by Kṛṣṇa as well was the violation of matriarchal custom, unthinkable in the older society, but which they managed to survive triumphantly, and in comparison to which all other sins paled into insignificance. Certainly, the *gokula* in which Kṛṣṇa was brought up would be patriarchal, as a cattle-herders' commune. But the *vṛndāvana* where he played his pranks was sacred to a mother-goddess, the goddess of a group (*vṛnda*) symbolized by the Tulasī (Basil) plant. Kṛṣṇa had to marry that goddess, and is still married to her every year, though she does not appear in the normal list of his wives; originally, this meant a *hieros gamos* with the priestess who represented the goddess, and the annual sacrifice of the male consort. Inasmuch as there is no myth of Kṛṣṇa's annual sacrifice, but only of his having substituted for the husband, he seems to have broken the primitive usage, as did Herakles and Theseus.

Mesopotamian glyptic. The *Nāga* was the patron deity, perhaps the aboriginal cult-object of the place. Such cults survive to this day, as for example that of Maṇi-nāga, which has come down through the centuries near Orissa. Nīlamata-nāga, for whom the brahmins wrote a special purāṇa [1]), was the primitive deity of Kaśmīr. The Nāga Śrīkaṇṭha had to be faced in a duel by Puṣyabhūti, king of Thānesar. Such local guardian *nāgas* are current down to the 10th century work *Navasāhasāṅka-carita*). So, our hero had a considerable following among the Indian people, even in the 4th century B.C. By the later Śuṅga period, he was called Bhagavat, originally the Buddha's title. A Greek ambassador Heliodoros [2]) proclaims himself a convert to the cult, on the pillar near Bhilsā. That Kṛṣṇa had risen from the pre-Aryan people is clear from a Pāṇinian reference (Pāṇ. 4. 3. 98, explained away by the commentator Patañjali) to the effect that neither Kṛṣṇa nor Arjuna counted as kṣatriyas. But his antiquity is considerable, for he is the one god who uses the sharp wheel, the missile discus, as his peculiar weapon. This particular weapon is not known to the Vedas and went out of fashion well before the time of the Buddha. Its historicity is attested only by cave paintings in Mirzāpūr which show raiding horse-charioteers (clearly enemies of the aboriginal stone-age artists), one of whom is about to hurl such a wheel. The event and the painting may fairly be put at about 800 *BC* [3]), by which date the dark god was on the side of the angels, no longer an aborigine himself.

A historical tribe of Vṛṣṇis is actually known about the 2nd century *AD* by a single coin in the British Museum found near Hoshiarpur in the Punjab. When Kṛṣṇa's people were driven out of Mathurā by fear of Jarāsaṃdha they retreated *westwards* to found a new mountain-

1) Ed. K. de Vreese, Leiden, 1936. This particular *nāga* cult had been virtually killed by the Buddhist monks (*Rājataraṅgiṇī* 1. 177-8), while the brahmins had also been reduced to helplessness at the time of the Buddhist teacher Nāgārjuna. They made a come-back by writing the Purāṇa (*Rāj.* 1. 182-6), as Kalhaṇa informs us in passing.

2) *ABORI* 1. 59-66; *JRAS* 1909. 1055-6, 1087-92; 1910. 813-5, 815-7.

3) See a forthcoming article of mine 'At the Crossroads' in the *JRAS*; for the cave painting (originally discovered by Carlleyle) Mrs. B. Allchin in *Man*, 58. 1958, article 207 + plate *M* (pp. 153-5).

locked city of Dvārakā, which is, therefore, likely to have been near modern Darwāz in Afghanistan rather than the Kathiawad seaport. When the Buddhist *Mahā-māyūrī mantra* (*circa* 3rd century *AD*) speaks of Viṣṇu as the guardian *yakṣa* of Dvārakā, however (Sylvain Lévi, *Journal Asiatique* 1915. 19-138; line 13 of Sanskrit text), presumably the latter city was meant; it is notable that Viṣṇu and not Kṛṣṇa is named. As for the Deccan Yādavas, the brahmins who found a genealogy which connected them to the dark god had no deeper aim in the forgery than to raise the chiefs of a local clan above the surrounding population.

Finally, there was also the useful messianic aspect as in *G.* 4. 7 [1]). The many proto-historic Kṛṣṇas and current belief in transmigration made the *avatāra* syncretism possible. It could also lead the devotee in his misery to hope for a new *avatāra* to deliver him from oppression in this world, as he hoped for salvation in the next.

5. WHEN DOES A SYNTHESIS WORK? Like the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the various Kṛṣṇas gathered many different worships into one without doing violence to any, without smashing or antagonizing any. Kṛṣṇa the mischievous and beloved shepherd lad is not incompatible with Kṛṣṇa the extraordinarily virile husband of many women His 'wives' were originally local mother-goddesses, each in her own right. The 'husband' eased the transition from mother-right to patriarchal life, and allowed the original cults to be practised on a subordinate level. This is even better seen in the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī which was supplemented by the *Ardha-nārīśvara* hermaphrodite (half Śiva, half Pārvatī) just to prevent any separation. Mahiṣāsura (Mhasobā), the demon 'killed' by that once independent goddess, is still occasionally worshipped near her temple (as at the foot of Parvatī hill [2]) in Poona).

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1) The assurance is unmistakable: "Whenever true belief (*dharma*) pales and unrighteousness flourishes, then do I throw out another offshoot of myself". The next stanza proclaims that the god comes into being from age to age, to protect the good people, destroy the wicked, and to establish *dharma*. It need not be further emphasized that the superfluous incarnation in *Mbh.* times wasted a perfectly good *avatāra*, badly needed elsewhere.

2) The cult is coeval with the foundation of Parvatī village, hence older than

Sometimes (as at Vīr) he is found married to a goddess (Jogubāī) now equated to Durgā, while another goddess (Tukāī) similarly identified is shown crushing the buffalo demon on the adjacent hillock. The widespread Nāga cult was absorbed by putting the cobra about Śiva's neck, using him as the canopied bed on which Nārāyaṇa floats in perpetual sleep upon the waters, and putting him also in the hand of Gaṇeśa. The bull Nandi was worshipped by stone-age people long before Śiva had been invented to ride on his back. The list can be extended by reference to our complex iconography, and study of the divine households. Gaṇeśa's animal head on a human body equates him to the 'sorcerers' and diablotins [1]) painted by ice-age men in European caves.

This is "in the Indian character", and we have remarked that a similar attitude is reflected in the philosophy of the *Gītā*. No violence is done to any preceding doctrine except Vedic *yajña*. The essential is taken from each by a remarkably keen mind capable of deep and sympathic study; all are fitted together with consummate skill and literary ability, and cemented by *bhakti* without developing their contradictions. The thing to mark is that the Indian character was not always so tolerant. There are periods when people came to blows over doctrine, ritual, and worship. Emperor Harṣa Sīlāditya (*circa* 606-647 *AD*) of Kanauj found no difficulty in worshipping Gaurī, Maheśvara-Śiva, and the Sun, while at the same time he gave the fullest devotion to Buddhism [2]). His enemy Narendragupta-Śaśāṅka raided Magadha from Bengal, cut down the Bodhi tree at Gayā, and wrecked Buddhist foundations wherever he could. What was the difference,

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the Peshwā temple to the goddess who killed that demon. Cf. Bombay Gazetteer vol. 18, pt. 3 (Poona District), p. 388.

1) *Art In The Ice Age* by J. Maringer and H. G. Bandi, after Hugo Obermaier (London 1953); especially figures 30, 31, 70 (with mask, and arms imitating mammoth tusks), 142, 143, and perhaps 166.

2) This shows in Harṣa's inscriptions (e.g. *Epigraphia Indica* 7. 155-60); benedictory verses at the beginning of his Buddhist drama *Nāgānanda*, addressed to Gaurī; Bāṇa's description in the *Harṣacarita* and Hsüan Tsang's account (*Beal* 1. 223; the stūpa, vihāra, fine Maheśvara temple and the Sun-temple were all close together near Kanauj, and all constantly thronged with worshippers).

and why was a synthesis of the two religions actually practised by others besides Harṣa (as literary references can show) not successful?

Let me put it that the underlying difficulties were economic. Images locked up too much useful metal; monasteries and temples after the Gupta age withdrew far too much from circulation without replacement, or compensation by adding to or stimulating production in any way. Thus, the most thoroughgoing iconoclast in Indian history was another king Harṣa (1089-1101 *AD.*) who broke up all images [1]) in Kaśmīr, except four that were spared. This was done systematically under a regular minister *devotpāṭana-nāyaka*, without adducing the least theological excuse, though one could easily have been found. The Kaśmīrian king remained a man of culture, a patron of Sanskrit literature and the arts; he presumably read the *Gītā* too. But he needed funds for his desperate fight against the Ḍāmara group of local barons. The particular campaign was won, at the cost of making feudalism stronger than ever.

The conclusion to be drawn is that a dovetailing of the superstructure will be possible only when the underlying differences are not too great. Thus, the *Gītā* was a logical performance for the early Gupta period, when expanding village settlement brought in new wealth to a powerful central government. Trade was again on the increase, and many sects could obtain economic support in plenty. The situation had changed entirely by the time of Harṣa Śīlāditya, though many generous donations to monasteries were still made. The villages had to be more or less self-contained and self-supporting. Tax-collection by a highly centralized but non-trading state was no longer a paying proposition, because commodity production per head and cash trade were low [2]);

1) For the iconoclasm of Harṣa of Kaśmīr, *Rājataraṅgiṇī* 7. 1080-1098. He had predecessors of similar bent, though less systematic: Jayāpīḍa in the 8th century (*Rāj.* 631-3; 638. 9) and Śaṃkaravarman (5. 168-70) in 883-902 AD.

2) The Gupta gold coinage is impressive, but hardly useful for normal transactions. Their silver coinage is notoriously inferior to, say, pre-Mauryan punch-marked coins, and rather rare in hoards; of Harṣa, only one coinage is known, and even that rather doubtful, in silver. The Chinese travellers Fa Hsien and Hsüan Tsang are emphatic in the assertion that most of the transactions were barter, and that cowry shells were also used, but very little currency. The accumulation by temples, monasteries and barons did nothing for the circulation of wealth or of commodities.

this is fully attested by the miserable coinage. The valuable, concentrated luxury trade of the Kuṣāṇa-Sātavāhana era had suffered relative decline in spite of feudal and monastic accumulation of gold, silver, jewels, etc. Once magnificent cities like Patna, no longer necessary for production, had dwindled to villages containing ruins which people could regard only as the work of superhuman beings. There was no longer enough for all; one or the other group had to be driven to the wall. One such instance is the combined Hari-Hara cult (with an image half Śiva, half Viṣṇu) which had its brief day but could not remain in fashion. The followers of Hari and Hara found their interests too widely separated, and we have the *smārta-vaiṣṇava* struggle instead. With Mughal prosperity at its height, Akbar could dream of a synthetic *Dīn-e-ilāhī*; Aurangzeb could only try to augment his falling revenue by increased religious persecution and the *jiẓyā* tax on unbelievers.

To sum up, writing the *Gītā* was possible only in a period when it was not absolutely necessary. Śaṃkara could not do without the intense polemic of theological controversy. To treat all views tolerantly and to merge them into one implies that the crisis in the means of production is not too acute. Fusion and tolerance become impossible when the crisis deepens, when there is not enough of the surplus product to go around, and the synthetic method does not lead to increased production. Marrying the gods to goddesses had worked earlier because the conjoint society produced much more after differences between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of property were thus reconciled. The primitive deities adopted into Śiva's or Viṣṇu's household helped enlist food-gathering aboriginals into a much greater food-producing society. The alternative would have been extermination or enslavement, each of which entailed violence, with excessive strain upon contemporary production. The Vedic Aryans who tried naked force had ultimately to recombine with the autochthonous people. The *Gītā* might help reconcile certain factions of the ruling class. Its inner contradictions could stimulate some exceptional reformer to make the upper classes admit a new reality by recruiting new members. But it could not possibly bring about any fundamental change in the means

of production, nor could its fundamental lack of contact with reality and disdain for logical consistency promote a rational approach to the basic problems of Indian society.

6. THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF BHAKTI. However, the *Gītā* did contain one innovation which precisely fitted the needs of a later period: *bhakti*, personal devotion. To whoever composed that document, *bhakti* was the justification, the one way of deriving all views from a single divine source. As we have seen from the demand for the quite insipid *Anu-Gītā* sequel, this did not suffice in its own day. But with the end of the great centralized personal empires in sight—Harṣa's being the last—the new state had to be feudal from top to bottom. The essence of fully developed feudalism is the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor. This system was certainly not possible before the end of the 6th century *AD*. The key word [1]) is *sāmanta* which till 532 at least meant 'neighbouring ruler' and by 592 *AD* had come to mean feudal baron. The new barons were personally responsible to the king, and part of a tax-gathering mechanism. The *Manusmṛti* king, for example, had no *sāmantas*; he had to administer everything himself, directly or through agents without independent status. The further development of feudalism 'from below' meant a class of people at the village level who had special rights over the land (whether of cultivation, occupation, or hereditary ownership) and performed special armed service as well as service in tax-collection. To hold this type of society and its state together, the best religion is one which emphasizes the role of *bhakti*, personal faith, even though the object of devotion may have clearly visible flaws.

Innumerable medieval rustic 'hero' stones [2]) commemorate the death

1) This is discussed in a paper of mine in *JESHO*, ii, 281-93, on feudal trade charters. Yaśodharman of Mālwā uses *sāmanta* as neighbouring ruler, whereas Viṣṇuṣeṇa (a Maitraka king) issued a charter in 592 AD where *sāmanta* can only have the feudal meaning.

2) The hero-stones carved in bas-relief are to be found in almost any village not recently settled, throughout Mahārāṣṭra and the south. A good collection is in the National Defence Academy's Museum at Khaḍakwāslā, near Poona. The death in

in battle—usually a local cattle-raid—of an individual whose status was above that of the ordinary villager. In older days, the duty of protecting the disarmed villages would have been performed by the *gulma* garrisoning the locality. The right to bear arms (with the concomitant obligation to answer a call to arms) was now distributed among a select class of persons scattered through the villages. Many inscriptions vaunt the Gāṅga barons' sacrifice of their own heads in front of some idol, to confer benefit upon their king. More than one epigraph declares the local warrior's firm intention not to survive his chief [1]). Marco Polo [2]) reported of the 13th century Pāṇḍyas that the seigneurs actually cast themselves upon the king's funeral pyre, to be consumed with the royal corpse. This suits the *bhakti* temperament very well. Though barbarous, it is not the type of loyalty that a savage tribal chief could expect or receive from his followers, unless his tribe were in some abnormal situation.

Though *bhakti* was the basic need in feudal ideology, its fruits were not enjoyed equally by all. By the 12th century, feudal taxation had begun to weigh heavily upon the peasantry, who paid not only for the luxurious palace but also its counterpart, the equally rich and even

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fending off cattle raiders seems to be symbolized in many cases by a pair of ox-heads in the lowest panels. The story progresses upwards, to the funeral, perhaps with a *satī*, and going to heaven. The top of the relief slab is generally carved in the semblance of a funerary urn, familiar since Buddhist days. For inscriptions, even a single volume (*Epigraphia Carnatica X*, for example): Kolār 79, feudal grant for family of baron killed in battle (about 890 AD); Kolār 226 (*circa* 950 AD), grant of a field, on account of the death of a warrior fighting against cattle raiders; Kolār 232 (750 AD), Kolār 233 (815 AD), Mulbāgal 92, 780 AD; Mulbāgal 93, 970 AD, etc, with the hero-relief in every case.

1) Less well known than Gāṅga inscriptions are the minor ones showing how widely the custom was spread: *e.g.* from the *Ep. Carnatica*, Goribindnur 73 (circa 900 AD), the village watchman sacrifices his own head; Cintāmaṇi 31 (1050 AD), when the Oḍeya of the village went to heaven, his servant had his own head cut off —and a field was dedicated to his memory; oaths of not surviving the lord are taken in Kolār 129 (*circa* 1220 AD), Muḷbāgal 77 (1250 AD), Muḷbāgal 78 etc. Occasionally, a memorial was erected to a particularly able hound, as in Muḷbāgal 85 (975 AD), and Muḷbāgal 162, though the dog's prowess rather than *bhakti* is praised.

2) Penguin Classics L 57, *Travels of Marco Polo* (trans. R. E. Latham), pp. 236-8, for the cremation, and ritual suicide in front of some idol, by royal consent.

more ornate temple. Brahminism had definitely come to the top, as may be seen from two monumental collections of the period, namely the *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara (minister of Govindacandra Gāhaḍavāla of Kanauj, *circa* 1150 *AD*); and a century later Hemādri's quite similar *Caturvargacintāmaṇi*. The latter was chancellor of the exchequer (*mahā-karaṇādhipa*) under the last Yādavas of Devagiri (Daulatābād). He is described as the outstanding computer (*gaṇakāgraṇi*). A few tables for quick assessment survive in Hemādri's name; the name is also (wrongly) coupled in Marāṭhī tradition with the general use of *bājrī* as cultivated food-grain, the cursive *Moḍī* alphabet, and the numerous close-jointed mortarless Yādava temples that had been built centuries earlier, to develop from little shrines of matchless proportion and balance into rank, clumsy, richly endowed structures by the 12th century. Yet his *magnum opus* is not another *Arthaśāstra*, nor an *'Āīn-i-Akbarī*, nor an Indian *Corpus Juris Civilis*. It is concerned almost entirely with brahminical rites and ritual codified from Purāṇas and other accepted religious works; the published seven volumes contain perhaps three fifths of the original. Any person who performed even a tenth of the special rites prescribed for any given deity, lunar date, transgression, celebration, worship, festival or occasion would have no time for anything else; as a document of a superstitious leisured class, none other known today will bear comparison with it. A section on jurisprudence preserved in Lakṣmīdhara's compendium shows that common law was practised and decisions for each caste, tribe, and locality based upon their particular customs; but the work repeats *smṛti* doctrine without mention of the innovations in practice.

The protest was expressed in Mahārāṣṭra by two different groups, both oriented towards Kṛṣṇa worship and—remarkably enough—supported by primitive survivals. The *Mahānubhāva* or *Mānbhāv* sect was founded by Cakradhara in the 12th century, and went back to the ideals of tribal, communal life. Black garments, absolute rejection of the caste system, organization into clan-like sub-groups, sharing among members, and a greatly simplified marriage ritual (*gaḍa-baḍa-guṇḍā*) prove this, though a few leaders of the sect later accumulated

some property, with a concomitant thirst for Hindu respectability. The other movement, crystallized by Jñāneśvara, was particularly strong among the seasonal *vārkarī* pilgrims to Paṇḍharpūr, who followed a custom which seems to date back to the mesolithic age. Jñāneśvara was under brahmin interdict, as begotten by an apostate monk; his aged parents drowned themselves in the Ganges, while he himself committed ritual suicide at Āḷandī, after a short but exceptionally bitter life. The Marāṭhā saints who followed him all wrote like him in the vernacular, had personally experienced the hardships of the common people, and came from all castes. Nāmadeva, though a tailor, carried the new doctrine to the far north, with success. Gorā was a potter. The untouchable Cokhā Meḷā was killed by collapse of Mangaḷveḍhe town wall, for the construction of which he had been pressed by corvée, old as he was. The Paiṭhaṇ brahmin Ekanātha, to whom we owe the present text of the *Jñāneśvarī* (in 1590 *AD*) as well as many fine Marāṭhī poems, went out of his way to break the crudest restrictions of untouchability. The greatest of them all, the 16th century *kuṇabī* peasant and petty grain-dealer Tukārāma survived grim famine, the unremitting jealousy of contemporary folk-poets, and the contemptuous hatred of brahmins, ultimately to drown himself in the river. These men represent a general movement by no means confined to their province and language. The generally painful tenor of their lives shows that they were in the opposition, and did not care to exercise the meretricious art of pleasing those in power—quite unlike the brahmins, who did not scorn to develop the cult of these saints whenever it paid, but always pandered to the rich. It is obvious that the real military strength of the Marāṭhās, and later of the Sikhs, derived from the simpler, less caste-ridden, and less unequal life which arose in religious guise. Naturally, the struggle was never consciously directed against feudalism, so that its very success meant feudal patronage—and feudal decay.

The conglomerate *Gītā* philosophy might provide a loophole for innovation, but never the analytical tools necessary to make a way out of the social impasse. Jñāneśvara's life and tragic career illustrate

this in full measure. He does not give a literal translation of the divine message, but its meaning and essence in his own terms, and in words that any Marāṭhā peasant could understand. Jñāneśvara's longest comment on the original comes in the 13th *adhyāya* of the *Gītā*, the chapter on the 'field and field-knower', particularly on *G.* 13.7 (where he himself apologizes in *J.* 13. 314-338 for having been carried away far from the original) and on *G.* 13. 11. In the former, (*J.* 13. 218-224), he flays the rainmaking *yājñika* fire-sacrificers; yet in *J.* 3. 134-5, these very sacrifices were taken as normal and necessary by him as by his divine exemplar; and once again (*G.* 18. 5; *J.* 18. 149-152) both warn us that the *yajña* must not be abandoned any more than charity (*dāna*) or ascetic practices (*tapas*). The suffocating contradictions of mixed superstition are neatly brought out in *J.* 13. 812-822: "The peasant farmer sets up cult after cult, according to convenience. He follows the preacher who seems most impressive at the moment, learns his mystic formula. Harsh to the living, he relies heavily on stones and images; but even then never lives true to any one of them. He will have My (= Kṛṣṇa's) image made, established in a corner of the house, and then go off on pilgrimages to some god or other. He will pray to Me daily, but also worship the family's tutelary deity at need, and other gods as well, each at the particular auspicious moment. He founds My cult, but makes vows to others; on anniversary days, he is devoted to the ancestral Manes. The worship he gives Us on the eleventh (lunar date) is no more than that he renders to the sacred cobras on the fifth. He is devotee solely of Gaṇeśa on the (annual) fourth; on the fourteenth, says he, 'Mother Durgā, I am thine alone' . . . At the Nine Nights (of the Mother-goddesses) he will recite the set praise of Caṇḍī, serve meals outdoors on the Sunday ,and then rush off on Monday with a *bel* fruit offering to Śiva's phallic symbol. Thus he prays uninterruptedly, never still for a moment, like a prostitute at the town gate". In Jñāneśvara's society, however, such eclectic worship was the universal practice at all levels, to the very highest people for whom Lakṣmīdhara and Hemādri indited their monstrous compendia. To that extent, though indirectly, the commentator voices a protest against the growth

of an oppressive upper class. The *Gītā* doctrine is given a remarkably attractive turn by Jñāneśvara's quite original interpretation (*J.* 9. 460-470): "Kṣatriya, vaiśya, woman, śūdra and untouchable retain their separate existence only so long as they have not attained Me . . . just as rivers have their individual names, whether coming from east or west, only till they merge into the ocean. Whatever be the reason for which one's mind enters into Me, he then becomes Me, even as the iron that strikes to break the philosopher's stone turns into gold at the contact. So, the milkmaids by carnal love, Kaṃsa by fear, Śiśupāla by undying hatred, Vasudeva and the Yādavas by kinship, or Nārada, Dhruva, Akrūra, Śuka and Sanatkumāra by devotion—they all attained Me. I am the final resting place, whether they come to Me by the right or the wrong path, *bhakti*, lust or the purest love, or in enmity". Neither the callous *G.* 9. 32 on which this charming comment is made, nor the fundamentally brutal Kṛṣṇa saga manifest such a calm elevation above jealous, exclusive *bhakti*. Yet, on the very next stanza, the scholiast extols brahmins as veritable gods on earth! His rejection by contemporary brahmins, which must surely have been a main reason for the decision to render the *Gītā* into Marāṭhī, never prevented him from striving after the brahmin Vedic lore officially denied to all but initiates. That is, he embodied the inner contradictions which he discerned in contemporary society but failed to discover in the *Gītā*. Therefore, he could launch no movement towards their solution. Though an adept in *yoga* as a path towards physical immortality and mystical perfection (*cf. J.* on *G.* 6. 13-15), there was nothing left for him except suicide. That the gods remained silent at the unexpected Muslim blow which devastated their many richly endowed temples, and no incarnation of Kṛṣṇa turned up to save the Yādava kingdom, might have been another cause for despair.

7. THE GĪTĀ TODAY. The main social problem was violently placed upon a new footing by Alāuddīn Khiljī and the Muslim conquest which imposed payment of heavy tribute. This intensified the need for more effective tax collection; that in turn encouraged a new, powerful and more efficient feudalism. Some optimists have maintained that

the poorer classes benefited because Alāuddīn squeezed only the rich, who were rendered powerless. This disingenuous view carefully neglects to mention that even in the Doābs (which were directly administered) none of the former burdens of the peasantry were lifted. Their dues were collected by a different agency, though it remains true that the HINDU upper classes were prevented for a while from imposing fresh exactions. The provinces had not even this consolation, for the throne of Delhi imposed heavy tribute upon conquered areas, without troubling itself about how provincial magnates gathered it—and how much more besides. Local military power was reduced only to a stage where it constituted little danger to the imperial forces, but the mechanism of violence more than sufficed for its main purpose, revenue collection. Whether the tribute was actually paid or not, and even over regions not subject to tribute, the imposts and exactions grew steadily. The class that collected the surplus retained an increasing portion, so that the needs of the state could be satisfied only in the earlier period, when feudalism stimulated trade and fresh agrarian production. Then the crisis was aggravated, to be resolved by another foreign conquest that introduced a totally different form of production, the bourgeois-capitalist. The modern independence movement did not challenge the productive form; it only asked that the newly developed Indian bourgeoisie be in power.